

Congressman Elijah E. Cummings

December 13, 2002

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*A message from
Congressman Elijah E. Cummings*



It is both a privilege and honor to represent you in the United States Congress. While serving you, I will continue outreach efforts to further inform you of legislative action in Congress. I welcome your advice. Government "by the people" is the cornerstone of my legislative philosophy.

*Elijah E. Cummings
Member of Congress*

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Congressman Cummings Elected to Chair Congressional Black Caucus

On December 10, the distinguished Members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) elected Congressman Cummings to serve as the Chairman of the 39-Member Caucus for the 108th Congress.

As the leader of the nation's most powerful coalition of African American House Members, Congressman Cummings will join in the legacy of his two predecessors of Maryland's 7th U.S. Congressional District, former U.S. Representatives Parren Mitchell and Kweisi Mfume.

"Our Caucus carries an important legacy and an even more important duty," Congressman Cummings said to the nation at a press conference following the election. "We have come together to renew the mission and leadership of the Congressional Black Caucus at a time when all Americans pray for peace and justice in their lives."

As CBC Chairman for the 108th Congress, Congressman Cummings will head a new CBC leadership team that includes Representatives Sheila Jackson-Lee of Texas (1st Vice Chair), Corrine Brown of Florida (2nd Vice Chair), Danny Davis of Illinois (Secretary), and Barbara Lee of California (Whip). With this team, Congressman Cummings will advance a legislative agenda that focuses on the challenges that people face in their everyday lives.

The agenda includes:

- Expanding access to quality healthcare
- Expanding access to quality education
- Increasing economic opportunities for all

- Encouraging reinvestment in our cities and rural communities
- Increasing minority home ownership
- Ensuring public safety and security: protecting our communities
- Creating a balanced and rational illegal drug policy
- Pushing for full funding of the election reform legislation
- Monitoring and speaking out on the federal judicial selection process

Congressman Cummings noted the words of the late Senator Paul Wellstone as the cornerstone of his theme for the CBC agenda. Senator Wellstone often said, "the American people yearn for political leadership that speaks to the center of people's lives -- a political center that calls out for affordable child care, good education for their children, health security, living-wage jobs that will support families, respect for the environment and human rights, clean elections and clean campaigns."

Responding to the reality that he will lead the Congressional Black Caucus during two years when both the Senate and the House will be controlled by Republicans, Congressman Cummings predicted that the CBC strategy will balance "conscience, constructive engagement and bipartisan cooperation."

He continued, "Thankfully, we are not in this struggle alone," he observed. "During the next Congress, our Caucus will continue to work with other congressional organizations that share our principles and goals, including the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, the Congressional Caucus on Women's Issues, the Congressional Asian Pacific Caucus and other people of conscience."

Congressman Cummings Secures \$1.4 Million HUD Grant

Congressman Cummings secured a \$1,370,000 federal grant to allow the Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development (BCDHCD) to continue operation of the At-The-Door project, a program that provides housing assistance and related services to prisoners with HIV/AIDS.

Available through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the federal grant will help transition newly released prisoners with HIV/AIDS by providing stable housing and a plan for self-sufficiency.

“Social workers will literally meet ex-offenders at the door upon release from prison,” said Alex Boston, Director of the Office of Homeless Services. “At that point the counselors will begin providing supportive services such as housing assistance, access to medical care, and job training.

“The stigma associated with HIV/AIDS makes it even more difficult for former prisoners to lead productive lives,” Congressman Cummings noted. “The goal of this project is to reconnect these people with their community and empower them with the tools necessary to combat the negative impact of HIV/AIDS.”

Since Congressman Cummings began raising the public’s understanding of the AIDS threat 20 years ago government funding for research, prevention and treatment for HIV/AIDS has increased dramatically.

“I will continue to work as I have for many years to implement federal action to stem the tide of despair associated with HIV/AIDS”, Congressman Cummings said. “This grant represents another positive step towards effectively battling the deadly epidemic and reducing the disproportionate impact of HIV/AIDS within our communities.”

Sponsors of the At-The-Door project include Health Education Resources Organization (HERO), Friends Research Institute, and AIDS Interfaith Residential Services (AIRS).

Congressman Cummings to Urge Supreme Court to Uphold Affirmative Action

Following a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision to review a case that could overturn affirmative action in university admissions, Congressman Cummings announced plans for submitting a amicus brief (friend of the court brief) urging the court to uphold university policies that have opened doors to college for millions of minorities.

The nation’s highest court decided on December 2 to review two cases, involving white students who did not gain admission to the University of Michigan. As a result, the students have alleged that the university violated their constitutional guarantee of equal protection. The court is expected to hear the case in 2003, with a final decision to be made in July.

“If the Supreme Court strikes down the university’s affirmative action program, it would sharply reduce the number of African-Americans in colleges and graduate schools,” Congressman Cummings said. “For instance, currently minorities represent 15 percent of law students at the University of Michigan. It is estimated that if affirmative action were eliminated, that figure would drop to 2 percent. This decline has been apparent in universities that have already abolished their affirmative action policies.”

Congressman Cummings then noted a Stanford University study which found

that increasing diversity in a college setting benefits all students, not just minorities. *The Dynamics of Race in Higher Education* found that cross-racial interaction increases students’ acceptance of people from other cultures, their participation in community service activities, and in other areas of civic participation. For more information on the report, visit: <http://www.stanford.edu/~hakuta/RaceInHigherEducation.html>

“In sum, the study pointed out that increasing diversity decreases the potential for racial tensions and increases understanding,” Congressman Cummings said.

He noted that another reason for upholding affirmative action was to help students who may not have attended affluent schools.

“There are still major gaps between schools in high-income areas and schools in lower-income areas,” Congressman Cummings said. “Many students are ill-prepared to take college entrance exams because of the major inequalities. As long as these disparities exist there will be a need for affirmative action.”

Save the Date

On Monday January 13, 2003 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., Congressman Cummings will host a second community forum to provide more information about the Drug-Free Communities Program, a federal program through the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) which provides millions of dollars in funding to support community coalitions dedicated to fighting the plague of drugs. The forum will take place at the University of Maryland School of Nursing, Room 140, located at 655 West Lombard Street.

For more information, call 410-496-2010.